

## **Noh Yoroboshi 弱法師** ("Stumbling Beggar Priest")

Takayasu no Michitoshi has disowned his son, Shuntoku-maru, due to untrue stories he has heard about him. Later, when he finds that the charges were false, he goes to Tennôji temple to offer alms to the poor in hopes that this will bring happiness to his son. He there meets the blind "stumbling beggar" who is versed in the temple's history and in Buddhist thought. He later realizes that it is his own son. Waiting till dark to reveal himself, they are at last happily reunited and the father leads his son home.

**Author:** Kanze Motomasa (1401?-1432), although the *kuse* section is thought to be by his father, Zeami (1363?-1443?).

**Scene:** Spring, at the time of the vernal equinox, Tennôji temple in Settsu province, in the present city of Osaka.

**Category:** Fourth category miscellaneous (blind, quasi-mad person) play, present-time (*genzai*) noh in one act, without *taiko* stick drum.

**Performance Practice:** Performed by all schools. In the oldest written version of the play, Shuntoku-maru's wife as well as priests of the Tennôji temple appear in roles which no longer appear in the present-day performances.

### **CHARACTERS** (in order of appearance):

*Waki* (secondary character): Takayasu no Michitoshi.

*Ai* (interlude character): An attendant of Michitoshi.

*Shite* (main character): Shuntoku-maru, blind son of Michitoshi. Mask: special blindman mask (*yoroboshi*).

### **SYNOPSIS:** Scene by Scene

1. *Waki/Ai entrance:* Michitoshi enters with his attendant to *nanori-bue* solo flute music. Saying that he is from Takayasu in Kawachi province, he tells how at the end of the past year, he banished his only son after believing false charges against him. Out of remorse, he now for seven days is giving alms to the poor at Tennôji temple so that his son may find happiness in this world and the next. He calls his attendant and has him announce this. [*nanori*]
2. *Shite entrance:* Shuntoku-maru enters to *issei* music and stops along the bridgeway. He sings of being unable to see the rising and setting of the moon, of his deep grief at being long parted from those he cherishes which he compares to an ever faithful pair of mandarin ducks, and the wheel of life which from a former world has made it necessary to bear his parent's wrath in this world. He also sings of the darkness which inevitably descends at some time upon the hearts of men, of the Chinese priest Ichigyô who, when banished to a remote land, was guided by a mandala of stars which appeared in the sky,

and his arrival at the temple gate of the revered Tennôji. [*issei, sashi, sageuta, ageuta*]

3. *Waki/Shite exchange*: Michitoshi remarks on the people gathered to receive alms and Shuntoku-maru describes the beggars exclaiming their gratitude. Michitoshi sees Shuntoku-maru and recognizes him as the one known as the "stumbling beggar" (*yoroboshi*). Shuntoku-maru likens himself to a cart without a wheel, and notes the scent of plum blossoms. They speak of the blossoms alighting on his sleeves like spring snow, and how all things are a part of Buddha's bounty. The chorus describes how the blossoms and alms fall together in the beggars' sleeves, how all things have their place in Buddha's realm, and how Shuntoku-maru, though blind, enjoys the beauty of this spring day as he embraces the path of Buddha. [*akeai, ageuta*]
4. *Shite's narration*: With the chorus singing for him, Shuntoku-maru describes the history of Tennôji, how Prince Shôtoku brought Buddhism to Japan and founded this temple of the four heavenly kings (*tennô*), how the prince, in a former life, was one of the patriarchs of Chinese Buddhism, the abbot Eshi, and the purity of the waters in the temple's "tortoise well" which is from the flowing stream which carries man to paradise. [*kuri, sashi, kuse*]
5. *Waki monologue, Waki/Shite exchange*: Michitoshi realizes that the stumbling beggar is his son who since being banished has become blind and feeble. Rather than revealing himself in front of so many people. He decides to wait until nightfall. Shuntoku-maru declares that it is the hour to contemplate the sunset and though blind, he sits to salute the East Gate and pray. Michitoshi tells him that he is facing the West Gate, but Shuntoku-maru replies that the West Gate leads directly to the East Gate of paradise. The chorus sings of the dancing sunset and Shuntoku-maru dances an *iroe* "color" dance. [*mondô*]
6. *Shite's action*: With the chorus, Shuntoku-maru dances and sings of recalling this delightful vision from before he was blind, of seeing the moon upon Naniwa bay setting behind the dark hills of Awaji island. But now it is the sun that sets and everything he sees is bright and clear in the scene within his mind. He describes the beautiful scenes of Naniwa in the various directions, the Sumiyoshi pines, Kusaka Hill, and the bridge of Naniwa, but then he recalls how he is pushed by crowds of people as people make fun of his stumbling walk filling him with shame. [*dan*]
8. *Waki/Shite exchange, Conclusion*: With the chorus singing for him, Michitoshi asks the boy's name and then reveals that he is his father. The chorus describes how the boy, excited and ashamed, at first begins to move away, but the father stops him saying that there is no cause for shame. The temple bells toll the night-watch and the father, in the darkness, leads his son home. [*rongi*]